

Corrections Quarterly Summary

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The ***Corrections Quarterly Summary*** is prepared by staff of L.I.S., Inc., for the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. To submit questions or comments, please write to the NIC Information Center, 1790 30th Street, Suite 130, Boulder, Colorado, 80301, or call (303) 939-8877.

QUARTERLY SURVEY QUESTIONS

In response to a request from Helen Hinshaw of the Virginia Department of Corrections, the survey this quarter addressed the issue of recidivism.

It should come as no surprise that survey results revealed a wide variety of approaches to recidivism among responding agencies. Problems encountered in recidivism research are well known, and it was not within the scope of this brief survey to resolve them. While the issue of recidivism is of great importance both to corrections agencies and to the public, variations among agencies with respect to how recidivism is conceived and operationally defined make it impossible to compare "recidivism rates" from agency to agency.

In any broad look at recidivism research it is most important to distinguish between definitions based on prior incarcerations of new prison commitments and those based on tracking releasees to determine if and when they are recommitted. Results of recidivism data using these two basic approaches are not comparable.

Survey responses indicate that 14 agencies look at "recommitment" and 19 track releasees. Eight agencies have no definition of the term, and the remainder either use an altogether different approach or provided definitions that could not be easily categorized.

In addition to basic conceptual differences in the ways agencies track recidivism, states reported many differences in operational approach. Examples include types of returns counted, the varying lengths of follow-up periods over which offenders are traced, and the sources of information that are checked.

Because of the complexity of these and other variables, results of this quarter's survey are presented on the following pages with no attempt to classify or **analyze** them. ***It is important to emphasize, again, that comparing recidivism data or "the commitment rate of recidivists" from agency to agency cannot provide an accurate, comparative picture.*** We have therefore simply reported agency responses directly. We hope that readers will, nevertheless, find the survey responses interesting.

Table 1: Agency Responses to Recidivism Survey

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
Alabama	5,349	-	-	A recidivist is a person who, after released from custody, is returned to the Department of Corrections. Recidivism rate is the percent of inmates released and subsequently returned to the Department within three years.
Alaska [Recidivism figure a result of a 1984 study.]	6,665	-	[22%]	A person who has served sentenced jail time of 10 days or more and is convicted of a new offense and recommitted to an Alaskan institution.

Quarterly Survey, continued

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
Arizona [This figure includes all new commitments with prior felony convictions, not just those with felony convictions occurring within the previous three years.]	11,693	[7,855]	67.2%	A releasee with prior felony conviction(s) who returns to custody within three years.
Arkansas	2,156	787	37%	A person who has been committed for one or more crimes and subsequently committed another crime or series of crimes. This includes an offender who has been released on parole, conditional release, or special release and who is alleged or found to have committed one or more additional crimes while in that status and is returned to the Department of Correction.
California	70,580	38,615	55%	A parolee is counted as a recidivist if the Board of Prison Terms finds that the parolee has violated his conditions of parole and orders the parolee returned to custody. A parolee is also a recidivist if he is convicted of a new felony while on parole and is sentenced to prison.
Florida	30,644	10,116	33%	In Florida recidivism is called a "recommitment" or prior felony commitment.
Georgia [Georgia reports a commitment rate of 35% since 1985.]	16,733	3,347	[35%]	The Official Code of Georgia states, "A person is a recidivist if convicted of four felonies, whether these convictions are for violations of federal or state law. The agency defines recidivism as a return to the Department of Corrections after release.
Hawaii	487	255	52.3%	An offender who has a prior commitment of incarceration and is recommitted.

Quarterly Survey, continued

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
Illinois [Of inmates released in calendar years 1983-84, 42.6% returned to an Illinois prison within three years of release.]	10,870	4,570	[42.6%]	A recidivist is an inmate released from an adult facility who returns to custody within three years. "Release" is defined as release to parole, mandatory supervised release, or discharge without supervision. Offenders with a new sentence or technical violations of supervision are included as returns.
Indiana [Departmental estimate of recidivism rate.]	5,684	-	[25%]	
Iowa [Figure as of March 1, 1989.]	2,745	-	[23.3%]	To be again placed in prison based on a new conviction.
Kansas [These figures for FY 1985 releases. Kansas tracks for one- through five-year follow-up periods.]	-	453	40.9%	The return to Kansas prisons of prisoners released on parole or through conditional release.
Kentucky	4,049	-	-	A person returning back to an institution within two years of release.
Louisiana	4,032	2,458	60.9%	Rate of return.
Maine	906	-	-	A person who has a tendency to return to criminal activity.
Maryland	5,881	-	-	Any releasee returned within three years to the supervision of either the Division of Correction or the Division of Parole and Probation.
Massachusetts [2,767] [This figure based on releases, not commitments, during 1986.]		747	27%	A recidivist is defined as any offender who is returned for 30 days or more to a state or federal correctional institution, or to a house of correction or jail, during a follow-up period of one from the date of release. This definition includes parole violators as well as those offenders sentenced for new crimes.

Quarterly Survey, continued

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
Michigan [Figure represents both parole and probation returnees.]	11,096	[2,786]	25%	A recidivist is an offender who returns to prison with a new felony conviction while on parole.
Minnesota [Figure based on releases during 1985.]	1,942	-	[24%]	An offender returned to prison with a new sentence within 30 month follow-up period.
Mississippi [Recidivism figure is a agency estimate.]	3,113	-	[30%]	Inmates who are incarcerated, released, and who commit new crimes or are returned to prison due to a technical violation.
Missouri [Figure for calendar year 1988, not fiscal year.]	6,700	2,131	[31.8%]	A person with a past conviction resulting in Department supervision is a recidivist if there is a new conviction resulting in Department supervision; parole and probation violators revoked to the Department are considered recidivists only if the revocation involves a new crime conviction.
Montana	542	105	19%	The number of parole violators coming back within a year compared with the number released on parole during that same year. This is an interim definition used by the Montana Board of Pardons. Eventually, when our computer capability is improved, we will use the definition of inmate returns within three years of release.
Nebraska [Commitments figure does not include returned parole violators.]	[994]	359	36%	Recidivism is measured by criminal acts that result in conviction committed by offenders released from the state prison system during a specified period who return to the system within three years of release.
Nevada	2,362	-	-	(N/A)

Quarterly Survey, continued

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
New Hampshire [Agency estimate.]	504	100	[20-25%]	An offender who has been previously convicted and sentenced to the custody of the Department of Corrections (prison, probation, parole) and who, upon completion of that sentence, reoffends and subsequently is sentenced to the custody of the Department.
New Jersey [Figure includes parole violators only.]	7,190	[1,987]	26%	The Department of Corrections does not use the term "recidivist," due to the lack of a commonly accepted definition among jurisdictions. The agency has studied release outcome and reported on indices such as rearrest, reconviction, reincarceration, technical parole violations, etc.
New Mexico	1,868	440	23.6%	A recidivist is a convicted felon remanded to the custody of the New Mexico Corrections Department who has one or more prior incarcerations within the Department.
New York	17,819	-	—	A person released from a Division of Corrections facility who is subsequently returned to custody. The Division publishes an annual report which follows each year's release cohort for five years to determine the number and proportion returned to custody within this period.
North Carolina	17,008	8,918	52.4%	A person who has an FBI record of a previous incarceration or is a returnee from parole.
Ohio [In calendar year 1988, 38% of commitments had been in Ohio prisons previously, including both new commitments and parole violators.]	-	-	[38%]	The Department of Rehabilitation and Correction most frequently uses the phrase "return to prison" rather than referring to "recidivism."
Oklahoma	5,326	1,598	30%	A person who has been previously incarcerated under the supervision of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections.

Quarterly Survey, continued

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
Oregon [These figures represent parole returns only. 46.7% of parolees released from January 1986 to January 1987 were returned to prison within 30 months.]	4,135	[1,441]	[34.8%]	A person who is admitted to prison and is a prior prison incarceration. The agency tracks releases rather than admissions.
South Carolina [This figure based on a study of 1984 releases, conducted in 1987.]	8,502	-	[32%]	A released, sentenced offender returned to the custody of state correctional authorities.
South Dakota	589	128	22%	A person incarcerated by the state who completed his/her sentence(s), was discharged, and returned on a new conviction.
Tennessee	2,753	-	-	A parole violator, probation violator, or someone with a prior sentence off parole who commits a new offense.
Texas	33,816	4,936	14.6%	An inmate with a prior confinement in the Texas Department of Corrections.
Utah [Figures for calendar year 1988; includes those with any prior supervision as adult, whether parole, probation, or institutional.]	1,129	[920]	81.5%	Any admission to prison for an offender previously supervised in Utah. This includes supervision on probation or parole but does not include juvenile supervision.
Vermont [Commitments figure is approximate.]	[2,338]	-	-	Recidivism includes: 1) criminal acts that result in conviction, when committed by individuals who are under correctional supervision, or who have been released from correctional supervision within the previous three years; 2) technical violations of probation or parole that are upheld by due process proceedings and result in incarceration.
Virginia	6,817	2,163	31.7%	A felon recidivist is an offender who has served time for a felony offense in Virginia and who is again convicted and sentenced in Virginia for a felony offense of one year or more, unsuspended sentence.

Quarterly Survey, continued

	Commitments, FY 1988	Number of Recidivists	Commitment Rate of Recidivists	Agency Definition of "Recidivist"/"Recidivism"
Washington	2,613	766	29.3%	Number of offenders released for Washington State Prison who are recommitted to a Washington State Prison within five years of release.
West Virginia	-	-	-	(N/A)
Wisconsin	2,641	614	[22.4%] [Note that this figure differs from state's calculation of return rate, based on release follow-up.]	The state counts as "returns" offenders returned to the supervision of a state correctional institution.
Wyoming	-	-	-	Any adult that has served time as a convicted felon who returns to serve a second sentence.
Canada	6,330	3,162	49.7%	An offender who has been incarcerated in a Federal institution more than once.

COMMISSIONER CHANGES

Oregon Fred B. Pearce, Director, Oregon Department of Corrections; formerly Sheriff, Multnomah County, Oregon.

Indiana James E. Aiken, Commissioner, Indiana Department of Correction; formerly Deputy Regional Administrator, South Carolina Department of corrections.